

THE NESTING OF THE INDIAN CRESTED SWIFT
(*HEMIPROCNE CORONATA*) IN UPPER BURMA.

BY

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On March 28, 1936, we found in the Pidaung Game Sanctuary of the Myitkyina District a nest of *Hemiprocne coronata* which offered remarkable opportunities for photography. The nest was in a small and almost leafless *Lettok* tree (*Holarrhena antidysenterica*) growing on a grassy plain, and was situated at a height of about 20 ft. from the ground. But for seeing the bird sitting the nest could hardly have been detected from below. The bird was remarkably tame and allowed us to walk under the nest and observe it at very close range, so on the 29th H. C. Smith stalked it with a camera and spent over an hour photographing it from the ground with a 17-inch Teleros lens in a Soho Reflex camera set up on a stand. After the first half hour, the bird refused to leave the nest and sat motionless except for turning its head and erecting its crest when anyone came too close under the branch. As is well known, the Indian Crested Swift incubates while perching upright on a branch with the body and tail on the far side from the nest and the breast feathers projected over the egg. Perched thus with the long wings crossed, and the narrow tail dependent between them, the bird presented a most unique and beautiful appearance as its chestnut-red cheeks and ashy-grey underplumage gleamed in the sun. From the level of the nest, the egg appeared to project well over the shallow rim of the saucer-like structure. We examined the nest after the young one had departed and it measured 47×30 mm. and at its centre was 11 mm. in depth. It was composed almost entirely of scales or flakes of bark gummed together with saliva in such a way that the outer layers overlapped somewhat after the manner of the scales of a fircone. The nest was attached to the eastern side of the branch which at that point measured roughly 50 mm. in circumference and was growing horizontally from north to south; the sitting bird therefore had its back to the afternoon sun. The nest was so shallow that presumably the egg would have been blown out unless covered by the bird during the sudden gales which sweep this district at all seasons of the year. The male spent most of the time sitting on a tree nearby and we considered that he took part in incubation. When together, the two were easily distinguishable by the deeper colour of the cheeks in the male and this was very noticeable on one occasion when the sitting bird was observed.

On April 26, J. K. Stanford re-visited the nest on two occasions with Major Byrne and a game keeper. The young bird was well feathered and sitting like the adult, more or less upright with head and neck extended, crest raised and beak pointing slightly skywards. The colouration, shape and attitude were so extraordinarily protective that the game keeper declined to believe it was a bird at all and had to climb the tree to satisfy himself. (Even his companions had some doubt at first although they were using Zeiss glasses at a range of about 25-30 ft.!) On the first occasion the nestling was sitting on the nest, parallel with the branch, later in the afternoon it was sitting across the branch, so that the short tail was just visible on the other side of the branch from the nest. The shape of the head and drawn-out appearance of the neck were most remarkable and the youngster appeared much more like a chameleon than a bird. The outline of the crown behind the crest seemed to form almost a straight line slanting to a point at the nape.

On April 29, J. K. Stanford again visited the nest with Major Byrne and Mr. D. P. Lister, B.F.S. Kodak photography without a telephoto lens proved a failure and after several attempts Mr. Lister produced a sketch which shows clearly the remarkable similarity of the young bird to a Nightjar. (This, we may say is well-illustrated by one of the photographs reproduced in Mr. H. Whistler's article on the nesting of the Crested Swifts in volume xxxiv of the Society's *Journal*, page 772.) The shape of the young bird's head had by that time altered considerably, but we all agreed that it bore no resemblance whatever to the shape of the head in the adults, which we could observe at a few yards' range as they sat on a tree nearby. The chameleon-like appearance was still most pronounced, and the young bird sat like a Nightjar along the branch with head and neck raised, beak pointing upwards and gape slightly open. In this phase of juvenile plumage, the mottled colouring also suggests a Nightjar much more strongly than a Swift.

The crest plumes, as far as could be seen with glasses at very close range, were in quill and quite stiff, in profile each feather being sharply divided from the next.

This bird was last seen on May 2nd, still on the branch but no longer on the nest; it had disappeared next day.

Photographs of the young being fed in its later stages of development would be of very great interest, and, judging by our experience in this case, should not be difficult to obtain.